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ABSTRACT

Although field work can be an effective means of increasing student awareness of a particular topic and fostering research skills that are difficult to develop in a classroom, field trips are too often conducted as dreary, meaningless sightseeing tours. This pitfall can be avoided by organizing field work activities using a six-stage systems approach which relates the subject to be studied with desired educational outcomes. During Stage I the instructor determines the topic of the field work and assesses study locations and activities in terms of their illustrative and educational potential vis-a-vis the desired educational objectives. In Stage II, administrative preparations, such as gaining institutional consent, determining costs, scheduling the activity, and making reservations, are made. During Stage III the students are prepared for the field work through an introduction to the topic in question and a discussion of the data acquisition skills that will be required. In Stage IV, the field activity itself, the students participate in observing, measuring, recording, and analyzing the field environment. Stage V offers a series of classroom follow-up sessions, and Stage VI provides the instructor with feedback via student evaluations of the experience. This descriptive essay includes charts illustrating this systems approach to field trip planning. (JP)

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FIELD WORK FOR THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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FIELD WORK FOR THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Field Work and Social Studies

Field work in the community colleges of this nation is found in many forms ranging from intensive summer field camps, where the student is totally immersed in a given region or topic for days at a time, to short field trips, during which very specific experiences of somewhat limited scope are obtained. At all levels of intensity field work has a significant role to play as it takes the students out of their classroom and places them in the reality of the world outside. It should be emphasized, however, that field work is only one of many effective learning modes and like them, it should be used in specific circumstances to attain certain goals, such as: (i) increasing student awareness of and interest in particular topics of study; or (ii) assisting students in data acquisition and methodology development that would be difficult to execute in the classroom; or (iii) placing students in a real world context where no variables are controlled, each operating in its natural setting. There is also an emotional element to be considered in field work, namely the individual 's reaction to a given situation, and this is something that cannot be achieved in the classroom. Such a phenomenon may serve to surprise, anger or stimulate the student but whatever the impact, it will increase the student's sensitivities towards what is being studied and if these emotions can be turned into productive energy or the desire to learn more about what is being studied, then an important goal of field work has been achieved.

For the social scientist the myriad of phenomena that are studied

can best be observed in the real world outside of the college. Furthermore, the subsequent analysis and synthesis of social phenomena can best be undertaken after real world contacts have been make, yet in conjunction with recorded research. The bulk of social research is not obtained from books but the majority of the experiences we give social studies students come from precisely that source, along with lectures. By the use of field work, the students' dependence upon book and classroom work as the sole mechanism for learning can be broken. In addition, the field experiences can help to bridge the gap between texts that are soon outdated in the social sciences and the "instant media" of radio, television and newspapers, where only the highlights of social phenomena or change are portrayed. Furthermore, real world experiences through field work can act as a transitional experience between college and the work place. It is surprising that experience is regarded as an important element in the working world, yet in education most emphasis is placed upon passive classroom and book learning. The development of more real educational experiences that will help students to prepare for their future roles in society can be obtained through field work.

Field work has, therefore, many educational advantages at all levels of instruction in the community college curriculum. In introductory courses it can be utilized to stimulate the students, to increase interest in new avenues of study and since it deals with the concrete, an aid to the comprehension, it forms a base upon which to build increasingly abstract concepts. Also, contact with real world phenomena through field work can reduce students' dependence upon the written word and facilitate their comprehension of phenomena outside of their

immediate zone of reference, or home region. Through field work investigations in the college's immediate environs students can develop the skills necessary for later, more indepth analysis and synthesis of a great variety of topics. In sequential course work field experiences have a vital educational role to play, as they provide the advanced students with the experience of gathering primary data and also giving greater insights into the quality and reliability of data sources. Similarly, they provide the opportunity to test hypotheses developed from readings and course work, in fact, they may be important conduits through which concepts are formed by the students themselves.

At all levels of community college instruction field work is of value. It brings the students face to face with reality and makes them observe, analyze and hypothesize about the complexity of the work outside of the classroom--the real subject matter of their studies.

In spite of the advantages that field work offers to the students, it can become a dreary drudgery, a dull sightseeing tour. To overcome this, the students must be made to observe and discover for themselves the relationships and patterns of the phenomena under analysis. To attain this goal, the field work must be well organized.

Organization is the key to effective instruction through the medium of field work. The teacher must carry out extensive preparations if this educational experience is to be successful. The aim of this paper is to offer such an organizational framework for field work construction, using a systems approach. The system outline here may be used for all types of field work and is therefore general in nature.

The Field Work Feasibility System

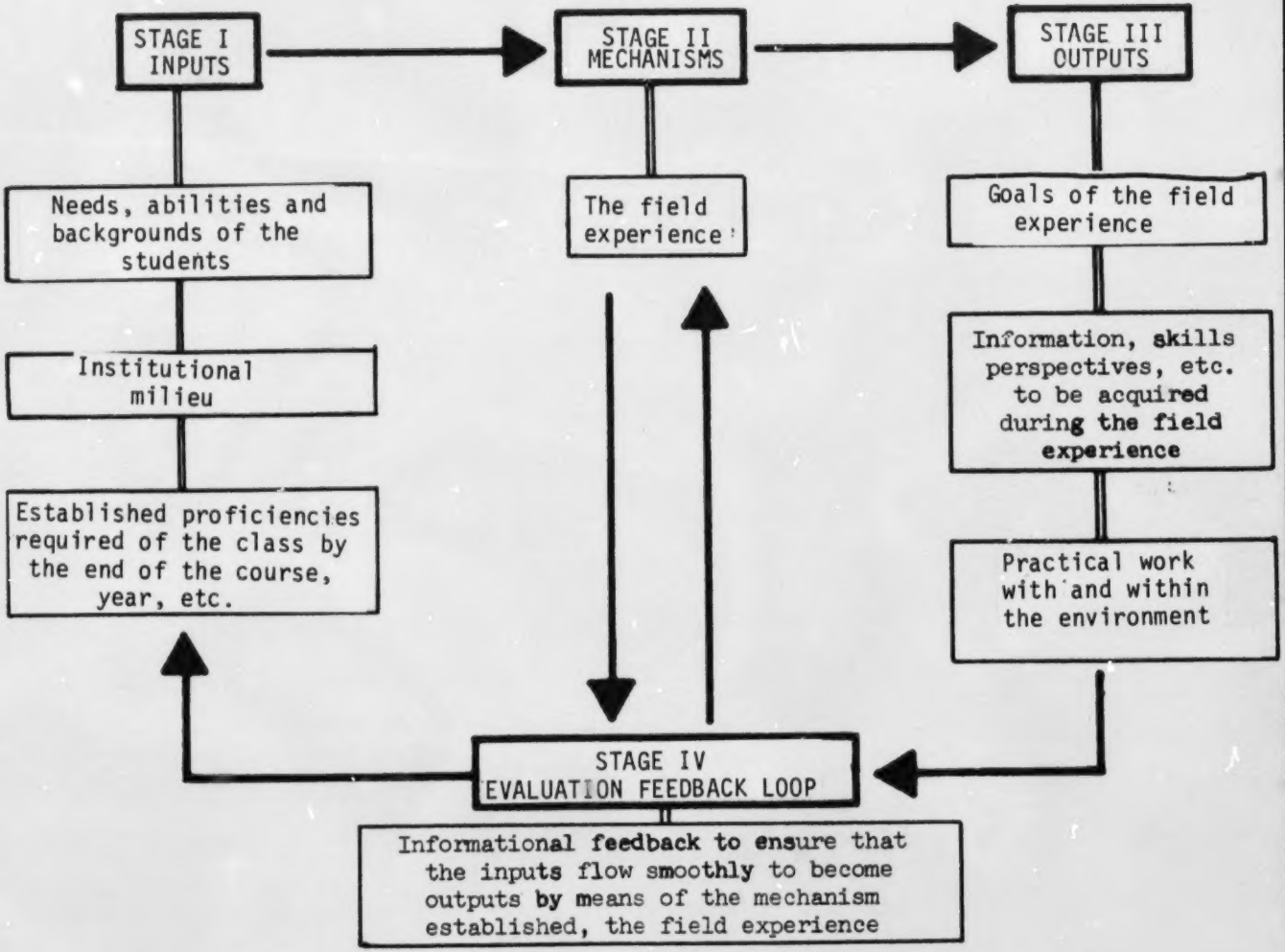
Diagram I illustrates a systems model utilized by the author to determine the feasibility of the desired field work project or study.

Within any decision making process the inputs into the system must be accurately determined. In this case the inputs (Stage I) represent the parameters within which the field study must operate: the needs and abilities of the students, the subject/topics to be studied, the nature of the teaching institution, etcetera. The outputs (Stage III) represent the desired goals of the field work, which are themselves part of the objectives for the total educational process that is on-going for the students. It should be emphasized, therefore, that the short term goals of the field study must fall within the parameters established at State I. the input stage. Finally, a mechanism, the field study itself, (Stage II) must be designed to take the inputs, in particular the students, and with them successively achieve the goals established. In the systems theory, given specific inputs and a specific mechanism, the desired goals should be achieved, if not, the system may be regarded as inadequate or incomplete and must be redesigned until an even flow exists from the input to the output stage.

Having considered the inputs, the bounds within which the instructor has to work and the abilities of the students, the field study can be designed. However, at all times the input parameters must be consciously born in mind.

DIAGRAM I

FIELD WORK FEASIBILITY SYSTEM


STAGE I
INPUTS
STAGE II
MECHANISMS
STAGE III
OUTPUTS
Needs, abilities and backgrounds of the students
Institutional milieu
Established proficiencies required of the class by the end of the course, year, etc.
The field experience
Goals of the field experience
Information, skills perspectives, etc. to be acquired during the field experience
Practical work with and within the environment
STAGE IV
EVALUATION FEEDBACK LOOP
Informational feedback to ensure that the inputs flow smoothly to become outputs by means of the mechanism established, the field experience

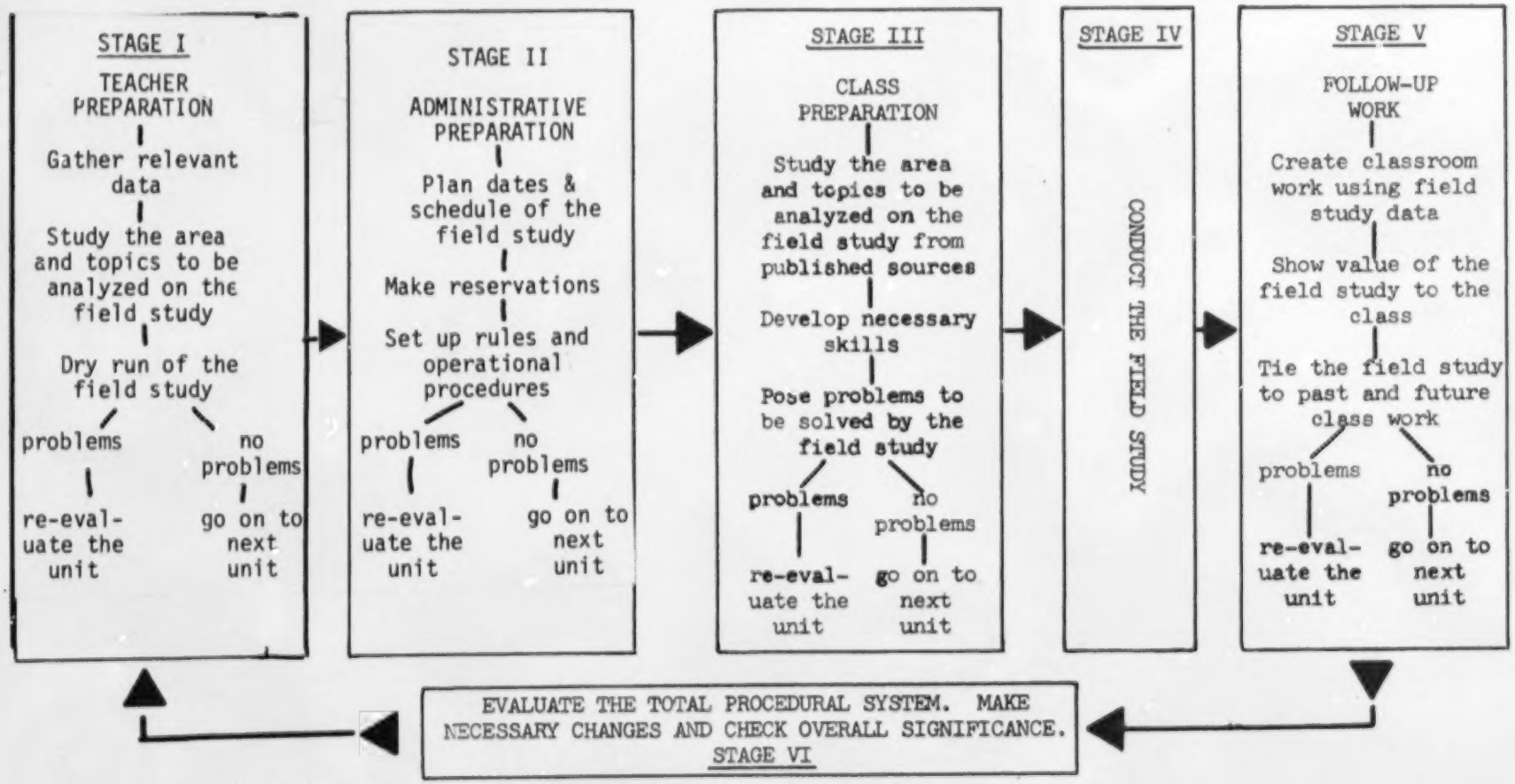
The Field Study Construction System

Stage I: Teacher Preparation

The first stage of the field study systems model deals with teacher preparation (see diagram 2). The topic of the field work and the area in which it is to be undertaken must be selected on the basis of past work done by the class, the complexity and variety of experiences desired for the class and available information. Area and topic selection must go on concurrently; the topics to be covered must be well illustrated in the study area. In certain cases topics may be determined and then the areas where they are best illustrated, selected. An easier approach, however, is to select a desirable and accessible area for study and then, by personal investigation, determine the phenomena to be analyzed by the class; phenomena that meet the input and output parameters established.

Having selected the area and topics for study, data collection for both the teacher's instructional and the students' practical use should be undertaken. The instructor must develop a relatively intimate knowledge about the study area, as real world situations tend to magnify, and in some cases exaggerate, methodological and informational weaknesses in a study leader's background. In all cases preliminary work must be undertaken in the investigation area. Study locations and traverses must be selected and assessments of their illustrative and educational potential determined, so that given these students and this topic in this area, the predetermined goals can be attained in the time frame available. To ensure this process, the specific goals established by the field study leader must be objectively tested in the reality of

DIAGRAM II: SYSTEMS APPROACH APPLIED TO FIELD STUDY CONSTRUCTION AND UTILIZATION


STAGE I
TEACHER PREPARATION
Gather relevant data
Study the area and topics to be analyzed on the field study
Dry run of the field study
problems
re-evaluate the unit
no problems
go on to next unit
STAGE II
ADMINISTRATIVE PREPARATION
Plan dates & schedule of the field study
Make reservations
Set up rules and operational procedures
problems
re-evaluate the unit
no problems
go on to next unit
STAGE III
CLASS PREPARATION
Study the area and topics to be analyzed on the field study from published sources
Develop necessary skills
Pose problems to be solved by the field study
problems
re-evaluate the unit
no problems
go on to next unit
STAGE IV
CONDUCT THE FIELD STUDY
STAGE V
FOLLOW-UP WORK
Create classroom work using field study data
Show value of the field study to the class
Tie the field study to past and future class work
problems
re-evaluate the unit
no problems
go on to next unit
EVALUATE THE TOTAL PROCEDURAL SYSTEM. MAKE NECESSARY CHANGES AND CHECK OVERALL SIGNIFICANCE.
STAGE VI

the field study area. Any problems arising during this dry run must be solved, otherwise the system will not function effectively. The changes to be made are usually in terms of the applicability of the topic to the area. As it is easier to change topics than areas, especially if one has become knowledgeable about the area, the former is the most often modified variable in the system.

State II: Administrative Preparation

Once the instructor has developed a data base, a knowledge of the area and topics to be analyzed by the student, the administrative details for the field study must be formulated. These usually take the form of institutional consent, costs, class scheduling, making appointments with resource persons and reservations, if necessary. Only when this stage is completed should class preparation begin, for if the study is not to take place much of the class preparation could be time wasted. It is often argued that Stages I and II (teacher and administrative preparation) should go on hand in hand. This is valid, as much time can be spent working out the details of a field study only to find that funds or time are not available. Unfortunately, many administrators in education cannot permit or reject field study plans until they know the time frame, location and experiences planned for the field work. Hence, the systems model illustrated here places teacher preparation as Step I and the administrative phase as Step II. Even if the field work cannot be undertaken valuable practical experiences will have been gathered by the instructor and since the topics to have been studied were part of the on-going study of the course topic in the classroom setting, they may be utilized as concrete examples or case

studies in the educational process.

Step III: Class Preparation

It is imperative that the students be fully prepared for the field experience. This necessitates introducing them to the study area, by means of maps and slides, and to the topics they are to study as well as to any specific skills that will be required to meet the established goals. One skill or technique often overlooked by instructors is that of recording observations, measurements and findings. Ensuring that the students have effective recording skills is essential, especially since later analysis and synthesis can be extremely difficult to undertake if the data base is poor.

It is important that this preparatory work be part of the on-going system of classroom experiences so that the field study itself will not be regarded as a mini-vacation -- it is, after all, merely another form of education, although an extremely effective one.

The students should have some input in this stage of the field study development system. If the students participate at this preparatory stage, the topics to be studied in the field often take on a greater significance because the students were partially responsible for their selection. Even minor decisions such as route planning or determining the schedule of events give the students a greater sense of responsibility with resultant higher quality output. No field work should be so inflexible that no variations from the teacher's operational scheme can occur. However, it is imperative that an explicit set of rules be established and adhered to rather firmly. Similarly, lists of clothing and equipment, that each student must have to effec-

tively carry out the field experience should be drawn up, printed and distributed to all participants. Too many students had the miserable experience of being cold and wet because of poorly selected clothing, or been frustrated because their equipment did not permit them to do necessary investigative procedures. Such situations are not conducive to effective learning.

Stage IV: The Field Study

Once the class has been prepared for the study, little remains to be done until the field trip is undertaken, thus it is imperative that the end of Stage III comes close to the starting date of Stage IV. Even after much careful planning, many instructors fail to maximize the potential learning experience of the outside world for their students because they transfer classroom procedures out into the field. As a general rule, field study experiences should represent work that cannot be done indoors. Lecturing and lengthy rides should be kept to a minimum. The students should be active participants throughout the field study; observing, measuring, recording, analyzing and attempting to synthesize elements of the human environment. The major reason for the study was to give the student a first hand, practical experience in the reality of the real world, so the students should be allowed to gain this.

It is highly desirable to have goals set for each field study day, so that the students utilize techniques and information learned in the classroom in the real world situation. At the end of each day, the instructor should summarize what was covered and why, while demanding that the students submit field reports of their activities and findings.

Later, back at the college, more formal written reports should be submitted. At the end of each field study unit, the instructor should note any difficulties that arose and attempt to correct them before the next field study is embarked upon.

Stage V: Follow-Up Work

To many students, field work has become an isolated event in their education, whereas it should be an integral part of the entire process. The final stage of the field study system should be represented by classroom follow-up sessions. These sessions should be more than reviews of what was discovered in the field, although it must be stressed that this is an important element of the process. With the practical field experiences to draw upon, more advanced work should be facilitated and constant use of examples from the field be made to illustrate it. An effective technique of referral is the photographic slide, especially if the image contains some of the members of the class. The slide will facilitate recall for the student of the reality of the phenomenon that were studied and thus help to create a concrete base from which more abstract or complex phenomena can be discussed.

Stage VI: Feedback

It is imperative that student evaluations of the field study be ascertained in the form of a strength/weakness questionnaire. The students' insights into the field experiences are usually different from those of the person who designed them and often offer constructive comments for improvement. This evaluation procedure is really a subset of the constant feedback that must go on at all stages of the field study construction and implementation. Only with such a data base and

corrections can a feedback mechanism help to produce a smoothly flowing system -- a highly effective, educationally valuable stimulating field experience.

Conclusion

The systems format lends itself well to field study construction. It has been widely used for many educational techniques, and its application to field work is based upon the desire to generate more effective educational experiences for our students. This is especially the case in social studies, where the complex web of interacting variables that come together to form an everchanging milieu which can overwhelm a student on a field trip unless the educational experiences are carefully orchestrated as part of the total education system.

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